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ABSTRACT

The author provides an overview of the people accepted into the National Program for Educational Leadership (NPEL). The candidates were examined through essays, references, interviews, and a battery of psychological inventories that examined intelligence, interests, and values. The characteristics of program Fellows are discussed, along with each instrument and technique used to assess them. A summary of the Fellows' characteristics is presented. (IRT)

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PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTRIBUTES OF A SET OF LEADERS MAKING MID-CAREER CHANGES INTO EDUCATION

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As I have perceived it, the National Program for Educational Leadership (NPEL) was a fascinating and meaningful adventure. It sought to improve the quality of educational leadership in the U.S. through taking on a hundred individuals who could provide evidence of accomplishment in leadership roles in noneducational settings and permitting them to design their own highly individualized programs of professional development. It was hoped and even anticipated that public service-oriented individuals from outside education could transfer useful skills but avoid the cognitive sets (i.e., the attitudes, expectations, and forms of readiness for tasks) typically characteristic of those trained and nurtured within a major societal institution.

For reasons reflecting changes in Congress and in the national administration the program was truncated part-way through. Sixty-two individuals completed the program at eight sites around the country. Several hundred applicants to the program completed application blanks, wrote brief essays about education and leadership, and listed references who submitted supporting letters. Inevitably, admission to the program became a several-stage procedure, the initial stages of which were probably far more effective, and less costly, than later ones. In fact, our analyses of the available program data suggests that the group and

individual interviews which often constituted a final stage in the selection procedures could have been abandoned without substantially changing the attributes of persons in the program. It is unclear whether recruitment or early stages in the selection procedure counted the most in the type of persons admitted to the program. What does seem clear is that those individuals who did not make it up to the point of a final interview tended to be criticized by persons rating them for not meeting NPEL program objectives (Van Gundy, 1974). For example, persons already in education were not admitted, nor, ordinarily, were persons lacking a commitment to urban education, or those under thirty or over fifty years of age. Applicants whose work experience appeared inappropriate, or those who lacked experience in leadership or who appeared to lack drive or energy, were excluded from further consideration. A study of letters of reference submitted suggests that those accepted into the program were praised somewhat but not significantly more often for organizational skills and somewhat less often for general character traits than persons excluded from the program.

There were two analyses made of essays submitted. One analysis of essays written by Fellows and a sample of rejected applicants indicates that accepted applicants wrote longer essays and made fewer self-oriented references and more references to tasks. The other analysis, which employed a second sample of rejected essays and a rather sophisticated computerized approach sensitive to personality traits as these might be revealed in essays, showed no significant differences between the personalities of persons accepted in to the program and those who made it up to the final stage of the selection process.

It is not altogether surprising that the interviews do not appear to discriminate between persons accepted into and those rejected from the program. While most personnel interviewers everyplace regard themselves as good judges of people, virtually no systematic study of personnel selection interview gives it high marks for either reliability or validity. Exceptions include modes of interviewing rarely employed, e.g., the anthropology-based, style-oriented interview developed by Eliott Chapple (1946), improved by the electronic equipment available to the Matarazzos (1956), or a form of interview employed by Ghiselli (1966) to discover how well informed job candidates might be about jobs under consideration. Chiselli reports that candidates who had a very solid grasp of jobs they were considering and who accepted job offers performed more effectively and with greater satisfaction for longer periods than the less well-informed. At any rate, (and I make the point parenthetically), it appears that, as I indicated earlier, the interview could have been omitted as a selection device with no discernible difference in the traits of persons admitted to the program.

As part of a self-assessment process in which they turned an objective professional "mirror" on themselves, most NPEL Fellows, after they had been in the program for awhile, took a battery of psychological inventories, i.e., standardized objective paper and pencil measures and discussed the results with a psychologist. Information is not available about individual Fellows because of the standard ethical commitment to respect their privacy. But we can describe the mean Fellow with some attention given to individual differences.

Intelligence.--They all took the Terman Concept Mastery Test which emphasizes verbal skills and is allegedly saturated with "g" (general abstract intelligence factor). It was developed by Terman in his study of gifted individuals for which he started with public school populations in California and looked carefully at persons with IQ's above 135, later above 165. Terman developed the CMT because no available test had been designed which would differentiate among them when these persons were grown. He added a low bottom to be able to differentiate characteristics of their spouses, who on the average would not be expected to be as bright. It is an unusually wide-ranging and differentiating instrument. The Fellows as measured tended to look quite bright, more intelligent than the average college graduate. An estimate of the average IQ would be in the low 130's, and the brightest ones in the group scored thirty points higher than that. Some of the persons had their intelligence underestimated for subcultural reasons. (Some of them had not taken English as their first language; others were from rural or ghetto areas.)

An associated measure often used in studies of creativity is Mednick's Remote Associates Test. High scores on the scale appear not only to show evidence of verbal facility, the ability to imagine several "free associations" to most verbal stimuli, but also interest in and a capacity for having a sort of intellectual fun with words. High scores have been shown to be correlated with the ability to write research proposals which tend to get accepted and ratings of creativity by colleagues and supervisors. As a group, NPEL Fellows scored higher on the creativity scale than on our measure of intelligence. This characteristic was especially true of those admitted early to the program. It was a little less true

of those admitted later on as criteria for selection changed.

Interests and values.--The Strong Vocational Interest Blank classifies persons in terms of the similarities of their expressed likes and dislikes to those of people in a number of different occupational roles. If you are like people in a particular occupational role, you would presumably be inclined to get along with them and to enjoy many of the activities that they do. The general pattern of interests of NPEL Fellows was fairly clear-cut. Essentially they show interests similar to those of persons with a combination of professional-scientific and social-service modes of relating to others. They like to run things and benignly to change environments of others. They show interests similar to those of public administrators, social workers, rehabilitation counselors, i.e., to those who enjoy working with groups and organizations, as well as to those of psychiatrists and psychologists who tend to work with individuals. Their interests look similar to those of chamber of commerce executives who tend to think in terms of working with relatively heterogeneous groups and pushing new enterprises. Interestingly, the Fellows also had interests similar to those of performing musicians and to those of librarians. High scores on the librarian scale are characteristic of people who like to read. It is hard to know what to make of the musician bit or why that should be characteristic of this group. A review of the scores of Fellows admitted to the program later shows them to be less inclined to be reading-oriented.

As a group, the Fellows showed interests least like those of persons who work at office management or office detail jobs, those who work at selling and sames management, and those who engage in written-verbal activities (although there were a very few marked exceptions to this.)

They also looked very much unlike scientists and engineers, production managers, and various outdoor work-with-one's-hands types.

On a scale of academic achievement they tended to look like persons oriented toward staying in school a long time and completing advanced degrees. The general pattern of their interests or preferred activities appeared quite stable. They looked decidedly extroverted and inclined to express an interest in many things and activities. Typically their interests approximated those of persons in the Strong sample of managerial roles.

The Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values had been developed on the basis of a German Verstehen approach to a typology of persons as being truth-oriented, business or pragmatic-oriented, aesthetically oriented, altruistically oriented, power-oriented, or concerned with ultimate values. On these scales Fellows' scores are like those who express an interest in helping others, a fascination with power, particularly political power, and with the achievement of harmonious relationships in social settings. They are most dissimilar in values to businessmen or persons characterized by any kind of economic pragmatism.

Results of the interviews.--These differentiate between Fellows in terms of their expressed ways of handling problems, particularly ones involving conflict. About half of them would prefer to mediate conflict with some amount of confrontation; tne rest would not. A number of them would emphasize their third-party approaches to conflict in very different ways from one another. Some would prefer to talk to individuals one at a time in an attempt to heal conflicts with others; about half of them would prefer to get them together with the others involved in the conflict

at some point during the conflict. Those who are both highly task-oriented and least extroverted were inclined to avoid setting up confrontation situations. Their range of approaches to problems was quite remarkable. Some of them simply could generalize about their approaches to problems whereas a few of the early Fellows in particular could provide a sequential list of items they would use in approaching almost any work or personal problem which they would encounter.

We tried to develop questions which would permit the interviewer to be more sure of the kind of judgmental information he could feed back to the Fellows as they attempted to plan ahead, taking stock of themselves, relating their goals to their resources so as to enable them to move more effectively ahead with a clear sense of purpose than might have been the case otherwise. That the interviews may indeed have had some utility for the Fellows is suggested by the fact that many of them would comment that they had never before experienced such an interview or comment on the value of their merely thinking about the questions aside from the utility for them of the convergence between test results and results of the interview. A list of the questions used in interviewing Fellows appears as an appendix.

Effectiveness ratings.--Each Fellow received at least two kinds of effectiveness ratings. All of the Fellows were rated by their coordinators, by the NPEL evaluator, and by the NPEL associate director. These ratings were on a number of personality traits and, though there was a marked halo effect, they did correlate significantly with intelligence and with traits such as responsibility and a tendency to look well organized and to complete tasks as measured by the omnibus inventories.

Later on in the course of the program other ratings were given to the Fellows on various assignments at which they worked. Longer assignments led to different ratings than short assignments. In one case, a lengthy debriefing occurred among four Fellows who had been working for the State of Illinois to evaluate its central staff. Separate ratings of Fellows employing a utilization of Bales' group process-based categories during the debriefing group interview led to essentially the same ratings as occurred when they were rated separately with a rating form of high reliability (in the .90's). Other ratings from sites where people visited tended to correlate more with such things as being self-critical or appearing pleasant and interested in what they were doing. The correlation overall between the two kinds of ratings was not significantly different from zero.

Summary.--The Fellows all appear bright, verbal, and much interested in persons, interpersonal transactions, and in ideas. While they show wide variation, the dullest looked capable of achieving quite a respectable college record. Interestingly, in no way could the very brightest be considered the most outstanding as leaders in these settings. Remember that they all had some record of accomplishment in leadership roles. They almost all look to be independent, achievement-oriented persons, typically looking more like entrepreneurs than like bureaucrats. They often appeared self-critical and a little deferential in their relations with others. Most of them seemed striving, ambitious, and interested in making their marks in the world as well as serving mankind. Their dominant motivational motiv seemed to be that of finding

satisfaction in evidence of their own achievements and in persistence at tasks. More than most people, they would seek to undertake leadership roles and engage in actions demanding interpersonal initiative, but they were rarely competitive with one another. Many of them expressed interests in changing environments in which they would produce some of the changes, and interests in helping others to do what they regard as right. they liked to be seen in a socially desirable light, and to avoid physical danger. They might take risks but generally only moderate ones and then only in some realms. Few were eager to risk social or self esteem, for example.

Least characteristic of the group was an interest in play, i.e., in deriving satisfaction from spontaneous, play-like activities as contrasted with work. Most of this fairly sober crowd tended to be inclined to work for ends beyond themselves, and they generally showed little interest in obtaining the kind of social recognition which occurs when one gets his picture or name in the paper.

They virtually all were (and are) persons whom one would describe as extroverted, with a wide range of interests. They showed far more energy than the average person as well as a greater sense of adventurousness with respect to undertaking new activities. Their most striking claims as they related to a battery of tests were those of interpersonal initiative and lack of fear of threats or interpersonal disapprovals. They decidedly did <u>not</u> look like conformists. Their values are more often liberal than conservative: They are urban oriented. On the average they do not appear to be very anxious or tense, nor lacking interpersonal warmth. However, they show more variation on measures of anxiety

and interpersonal warmth than on any other variables. Some of the Fellows are extremely anxious and some, often the same ones, express strong needs for interpersonal closeness. Three variables--anxiety, interpersonal warmth, and tendency to be susceptible to interpersonal threats--vary very strongly. There is also a pronounced variation in such traits as their ability to derive satisfaction from social affiliative activities, their ability to acquire satisfaction from social recognition, and their tendencies to operate in an orderly, consistent way. As is to be expected they show the least variation on traits on which there was careful selection, either advertently or inadvertently and the biggest variation on traits which were largely ignored in the selection process.

Serendipitous gains and the selection technology of the future.--All of the Fellows in the program wrote essays as part of the admission requirements, a brief biographical and an educational one. Each amounted to a data set which could be analyzed and related to other information. In this case, it proved feasible to use a computer-based dictionary which would get at some 7700 word meanings and catalogue these into some 200 categories. A number of the categories turned out to be especially useful in that they releated to various personality and interest test scales as well as intelligence. The results of these were in fact rather striking and are reported separately. In fact, they are so promising as part of a developing personnel technology that it seems worthwhile to cross-validate these results with other data acquired elsewhere.

A serendipituous result of the study was an increased emphasis on examination of the social matrix or the social context in which they

might work, and an effort to develop and examine criteria in terms of which their performance and satisfaction might be predicted. These efforts continue to develop. Essentially the environments surrounding one can be separated into the physical environment, the social climate, the press as an obverse to need--whether positive or negative, the demographic characteristics of a group (size, roles, distribution of ages, status, and sex, etc.), the information characteristics of the environment, the task characteristics they face, the contingencies in terms of which they acquire reinforcements or indulgences, the positive and negative sanctions involved, the exchange of values which occurs in their operations and, as a result of these, the nature of the transactions with the outside environment and the nature of that environment whether it appears benign, strong, rigid, chaotic, or clear and so on. Inventories exist for several of these attributes whereas others need much to be developed.

Speculations.--I have described some of the characteristics of a competent group of individuals who have entered the ranks of educational executives. I have not described how these persons have performed in their new careers--how effective or satisfied they have become. Such long-term evaluation would seem highly appropriate; it has not yet proved feasible to undertake it. Our hypothesis is that, even among a set of persons as homogeneous on some variables as these people are, they will prove most effective and satisfied in work settings, roles, and at tasks which (a) differ a good deal from one another and (b) provide a best fit with skills and values of those individuals. The primary support for this hypothesis lies in the observation that Fellows would tend to seek

experiences where they could use and further develop skills he or she had before entry into the program. While human relations skills and problem diagnosis skills were both particularly valued by persons in the program, in general Fellows appear to seek out experiences which would call for skills they already possessed. But my colleagues on this panel may have more to contribute on this line of thought than I.

APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. I am interested in how you approach problems. Would you characterize yourself as having a general approach to problems, would you say you approach each differently? Could you describe particular ones that you have encountered recently and tell me how you dealt with them? Or, could you give me examples of some of your decision rules?

2. I am interested in how you might deal with conflicts between two other persons. Have you in a managerial role had at some point to act as a healer, dealing with or attempting to resolve a conflict between others? Can you tell me what you did?

3. Suppose that instead of two other persons being involved in a conflict setting that you were directly involved yourself. How have you handled things of that sort?

4. Suppose that instead of a conflict per se, there was a crisis, a tense turning-point, an emergency which called for quick and often innovative action in somebody's life where you could be in a position of helping. Have you had any experiences of that sort either at work or in your personal life? If so, could you describe how you handled those?

5. Have you dealt with crises in which you personally were involved? If so, how have you handled a crisis of your own?

6. What do you consider to be your own greatest strength in dealing with the kind of work situations which attract you?

7. In what kinds of settings do you consider yourself to be most effective?

8. What kinds of persons would you prefer to have around you and

working with you to be able to accomplish the most?

9. What sorts of persons would you avoid hiring or having work with you if you could help it? That is, what attributes appear to be least useful and least attractive to you?

10. Can you give me examples of some of the kinds of work settings that you would especially avoid because you would find them frustrating? Or, could you give me a number of examples of situations in which you have worked that have been relatively unpleasant?

11. What attributes about yourself would you most prefer to change, which would you like to have more or less of?

12. To what extent do you find yourself dissatisfied with where you are?

13. What do you see as your own goals over the next few years? Where would you like to be when you look 5 or 10 years hence? Do you see way-stations toward getting there? Do you see obstacles in your way?

14. Many people would characterize U.S. education as having problems; what would you regard as the chief problems U.S. public education faces at the present time?

15. As you look to the future, over the next 10 or 15 years, how do you expect these problems to work out?

16. Aside from education, what do you feel are the major problems the country faces these days and why?

16. How, over the next 10 or 15 years, do you expect these problems to work out?